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ABSTRACT

The Academic Career Studies (ACS) program at Clovis Community College focuses on time management, concentration and memory techniques, effective reading and note taking, test-taking skills, creativity, and the qualities of people who are "masters" at what they do. The program targets students who are working on their General Educational Development (GED) certificate, who have poor academic records, or who are welfare recipients in the Project Forward program. The Project Forward participants in particular come to the ACS program with low self-esteem and self-worth, growing out of a history of abuse and other negative experiences. The ACS educators address the issues of self-esteem by providing a supportive environment in the classroom--accepting students for who they are; appreciating students and all the experiences which make them what they are; and affirming students so they can see the potential in themselves. Examples of ACS classroom activities that address these goals include the following: (1) students fill out a wellness inventory to assess how well they are physically, emotionally, and spiritually; (2) students complete a Plus and Minus Chart to identify all the positive things in their lives as well as the negative; (3) students write a letter to a person whom they admire; (4) students chart their lives on a poster board, after the instructor completes the exercise first including failures as well as positive experiences; and (5) students chart their goals in four areas of their lives. When an instructor expects the best from students and centers on strengths rather than weaknesses, students are more likely to grow and fulfill these expectations. (JMC)

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The Redemptive Role of the Community College
Within a Rural Society

Academic Career Studies is built on the concept that there are certain people who possess qualities that make them master students of life. Consequently those same kinds of qualities and competencies are present when a person is successful in college. We use Dave Ellis's book from his company College Survival, Inc., entitled Becoming a Master Student. The thrust of the book is that a person just needs the right tools to help him or her become successful in college.

We cover a variety of topics which include: qualities of people who are "masters" at what they do, time management, concentration and memory techniques, effective reading and note taking, test-taking skills, creativity processes and learning about resources that are available to the college student. The course is designed not only to boost those study skill competencies but give a tremendous boost to the self- esteem of the student to help him or her realize that they can be successful.

We realize that not only are these skills useful in school, they are useful to the basic structure of life because principles of organization, observation, concentration, using time wisely and reading are necessary for a lifestyle to function competently.

Clovis Community College is unusual. This past year, CCC participated in an award winning program of the state government called Project Forward. Students who qualify for the program have successfully participated in a unique concept that will emerge no doubt in community colleges all across the United States.It is a program where women or men who are on welfare assistance, get financial help for school books, supplies and mileage to attend our community college. The rest of the tuition costs is picked up by grants.

This not only helps these people get out of the "rut" of everyday existence, it gives light at the end of the tunnel which for some no light has shown for years. And not unlike Grey who wrote in Grey's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," "For many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance on the desert air," I have come in contact with many students at the CCC who are finally being given a chance to display their beauty.

In the Academic Career Studies program, we take these students who are working on their GED, or have already passed their GED, or simply just have a poor academic record. Maybe they are students who have been out of school for many years. I had a student two semesters ago who had been out of school for 39 years. If it were not for this program, these people would be wilting by the side of the road somewhere as the flowers described in the country churchyard.

Let me give you some characteristics of the kinds of people that participate in Project Forward.Last semester, the range of ages in one of my classes was 19-70. A large percentage have been married and divorced. Some are widowed. In sharing times in class, I have found that a great percentage of them have been abused as spouses, were physically or sexually or emotionally abused as children and teenagers, and some were even living in the house for battered women at the time of this writing. Some have been in prison and some are on probation.

Also in questionnaires given anonymously to all my classes, I found that a good percentage of them were children of alcoholics, some were married to alcoholics, some were recovering alcoholics and a good number were smokers. A smaller yet significant percentage were on medication for depression and eight of my 144 students had tried suicide.

I don't think these characteristics are that unusual. I think they are more of a commentary of many students all across the United States.Yet when we as instructors get these students in our classes, there is a whole ton of cargo associated with them, heavy emotional baggage that they must deal with. If they have put most of their bags down, there are yet little satchels and smaller cases with negative memories and emotional upheavals of the past that drag them down. As educators we cannot ignore the fact that this emotional baggage is very much a part of their

"studentness." Acknowledgement of this aspect of the student offers hope to them because when the psyche is healed, the brain can be developed.

It is in addressing these issues of low self esteem and self worth that I have entitled this presentation" The Redemptive Value of the Community College Within a Rural Society."

How do educators address self-esteem issues in class? According to Soar, growth is optimized in a supporting environment. We can do some things as educators to help students see their worth as individuals by giving that supporting environment in the classroom.

We cannot be skeptical, insulating ourselves from our students.A warmth and consequent trust must be established between instructor and student. It is called "people involvement." I don't think I coined that myself. I might have read it somewhere but I don't remember where.

We must be the kind of teachers that are effective with students. It was something like this experience that Charles Swindoll quotes in his book Come Before Winter:

> **One raw winter night, the man heard an irregular thumping sound against the kitchen storm door. He went to a window,and watched as many little shivering sparrows, attracted to the evident warmth inside, beat in vain against the glass.**
>
> **Touched, the farmer bundled up and trudged through fresh snow to open the barn for the struggling birds. He turned out the lights, tossed some hay in a corner and sprinkled a trail of saltine crackers to direct them to the barn. But the sparrows which had scattered in all directions when he emerged from the house, still hid in the darkness afraid of him.**

> He tried various tactics: circling behind the birds to drive them toward the barn, tossing cracker crumbs in the air toward them, retreating to his house to see if they would flutter into the barn on their own. Nothing worked. He was a huge alien creature who had terrified them! The birds could not understand that he actually desired to help.
>
> He withdrew to his house and watched the doomed sparrows through the window.Then a thought hit him like a lightening from a clear blue sky:If only I could become a bird- one of them- just for a moment. Then I wouldn't frighten them so. I could show them the way to warmth and safety (Swindoll 343).

We cannot become like our students because we cannot make ourselves like other people. Yet to identify with them to some deeper degree, we should not be afraid to come out of our academia, from behind our degrees and be vulnerable to them. Tell them you have problems too. You have problems with your kids. You never have enough money. Yes, you have had checks bounce before! Yes, you and your husband or wife do fight at times. But, there is hope. We are all possessors of shared feelings and experiences. Tell them...show them that they are not alone.

I tell my students the following statement: The only thing you can really control in your life is your mental attitude. We can't change where we have been or what has made us like they are. But we can help students see that they are in control of what happens from here on out.

There are three ways that we can do this. We can Accept them...yes right where they are. We can appreciate them and all the culmination of experiences and feelings that make them like they are. We can affirm them so they can see the potential in themselves.

First we accept them - who they are and where they are. We know that they have burdens, but we must help them see that those burdens cannot paralyze their progress.

Virginia Satir wrote:

> **"I can see, hear, feel think, say and do.**
> **I have the tools to survive,**
> **to be close to others,**
> **to be productive,**
> **and to make sense and order out of**
> **the world of people and things outside me.**
> **(Satir 43).**

We try to help them make some academic progress in spite of the puzzles, pain and struggles that they have been through or are going through because like Virginia Satir wrote, they have the tools for potential production.

These Project Forward people come with their own peculiar problems. Besides all their lives of pain and struggles, they feel like second class citizens because they are on welfare and use foodstamps at the grocery store.

How do we accept them? There are some ways. First of all say to them in your everyday teaching "**I esteem you.**" I mean don´t say it out loud but say it by how you teach. "**I esteem you.**" And when they realize that you really do esteem them, they begin to trust you.

Trust is not too well known among these women. Why? Because of all the emotional baggage they carry. Molested as children...beaten as wives....abused verbally and sexually as children...all too well their emotional baggage is packed to the maximum.

Not only that we have to get them to accept themselves. Helping them to give up their negative images of who they were in the past. Ask them: Do you accept yourself?

I give an overview of self- esteem to help them determine how they really feel about themselves.

1. Do you worry about what others think of you? 2.Look at yourself...do you think you are a smart person and an emotionally stable person? 3. How do you think that others view you? 4. Do you have a sense of meaning and fulfillment in your life? 5. Do you have close fulfilling friendships?

Also, we want them to take stock of their circumstances and see if they are as bad off as they think they are.

One student said: "Judy my past is so bad, my experiences are such that my present circumstances are so hard I have nothing going for me. Everything in my life is negative. I feel in bondage. I really feel like I am in prison."

I want to make two points about this concept. First of all, I have my students fill out a wellness inventory. It attempts to reflect how well they are physically, emotionally and spiritually. We talk about habits and facets of our lives that feed these three dimensions of our personalities. This way, when the little circles are filled out, students and you can see what feeds each one of those circles or aspects of their personalities.

Secondly I give them, a Plus and Minus Chart.I tell them how it came about. When we found out that our third

child was severely communication disordered, the doctor used this with us to help us see all the possibilities in our lives that would be positive steps in dealing with the situation.It targets all the positive things in their lives as well as the negative. Students see, when on paper, that they have many positive aspects in their lives.

Next we can appreciate them. And help them to look at themselves and appreciate themselves as individuals with talents, aspirations and dreams.

These are smart creative people. Just like the flower that blooms in the desert and no one is ever there to appreciate its beauty these students have great abilities.

If we are a product of our pasts, it is amazing that they can accomplish anything in the classroom.

So what do we tell them? How do we appreciate them where they are? When we appreciate them we really understand them. We walk in their shoes so to speak. Harper Lee put in quite well in her wonderful book To Kill a Mockingbird.

Atticus Finch was talking with Scout about Boo Radley, their mysterious neighbor.

"First of all," he said,"if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view..."

"Sir?"

"...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Harper Lee

Try to do just that. Try to understand them from their point of view.By doing this we can help them see themselves as significant individuals.

I tell my students that I know their lives are full of mistakes and blunders because mine is. This has nothing to do with your significance as an individual. Tomorrow is a new day; start it with high spirits. I help them to see that this day is too precious to waste regretting mistakes made in days past.

One thing that I have my students do is to read **Saggy Baggy the Elephant**. It is a story about a little elephant who felt like he had to live up to everyone else´s expectations.He didn´t appreciate the good qualities he already had. Then I assign them a two page introspective report on what Saggy Baggy so they can see that they can accept themselves for all their unique characteristics and abilities.

Another activity I have them do is to write a letter to a person who is one that they admire. I see this as an exercise to reach out to a role model. In reaching out, they can accept their own identity with the human race.

Secondly we appreciate what they have come from. We all have had rough experiences but our reactions to those experiences is what we can control. Like Barbara Johnson said," Pain is inevitable but misery is optional."

One of the things I have my students do is chart their life on a poster board. I first do my life for all the class

to see on the chalkboard. Yes, I even chart flunking 3rd grade and later at 19 checking out of Baylor University with three "withdrew Failings" which later turned to F's because I didn't make those classes up. So when I asked the students to do this, I don't ask them to expose any more than they want to. Yet, I tell them to put down negative and positive experiences as well.

Somehow when this exercise is done and life is put into prospective and becomes a tangible thing on paper, there are two things that come from it for the student: It lets them see the whole picture of things. That is where students see the necessity of setting short-term-mid-term and long-term goals.

When we focus on this concept,I give my students a grid to chart their goals in four areas of their lives. It shows them that time is nothing to squander because somewhere sometime it will all end.To understand what causes people to do what they do, it is necessary to look at their past. We are, as Tennyson has Ulysses say,"a part of all that we have met," and we can tell a great deal about our students by where they have been.

We must appreciate all the different things about our students.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many have second jobs.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many have children at home, have to hire babysitters.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many are chronically ill, disabled and in poor health because of poor lifestyles. And a whole range of problems come with this.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many live in dysfunctional families or have come from dysfunctional families.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many have a warped sense of self worth because of childhood abuses.

Appreciate or understand the fact that many have a low self-esteem because they are on welfare at the present time.

Appreciate or recognize them as individuals, worthy individuals.

One of the things that I do to help them appreciate their talents and unique abilities is to pass out cards and have students write one thing that they are good at and one thing that they would like to learn on the other side. Then I have them find someone to link up with.This gives them the opportunity of teaching somebody else something.

Thirdly we affirm them in their time with us. Affirm them. I really mean helping them to see their worthiness. Be kind to them.Help them. Smile with them and at them.Your smile will say much to them. Reach out in the

"not so comfortable zone" and soon it will become comfortable! Compliment your students. It sparks success.

Our students will respond to how they are treated, how they are affirmed. Expect the best from your students. Center on strengths rather than weaknesses. Give them a climate in which to grow by affirming their uniqueness.

Help them to see that there are qualities that they possess-and those qualities that are already there can be used to help develop a successful school and life experience. Each person has something significant about them, even if we might think it is small.

Help your students capitalize on those abilities that are within them . When we do this we are affirming their worthiness.

Help them to see their uniqueness. I read in Bringing Out the Best in People an example of this concept.

> We once had a President named Taft. The Taft family was evidently good at pushing their children to cut their own swath and to find a specialty of which to be proud of. When Martha Taft was in elementary school in Cincinnati she was asked to introduce herself. She said: "My name is Martha Bowers Taft. My great-grandfather was President of the United States. My grandfather was United States Senator. My daddy is ambassador to Ireland . And I am a Brownie! (McGinnis 19-20).

We must surround our students with a nurturing environment so they can grow up those qualities already within them. This involves exercises in stretching their minds, changing and helping them to capitalize on their successes.

How do we affirm them? I send letters to my students twice a semester. These are letters of praise. I find something to praise them for.

We can find something to praise in these students We have "Applause and Standing Ovation Time." We give standing ovations as a class to each other.

We show them that they are significant individuals. Everywhere we turn we are bombarded with self worth issues. Hard enough as educated people not to think that: we should color that gray when TV tells us we should; be thin when magazines confirm in their spring show of bathing suits that we should be able to wear them and look good in them.

Tell your students: there are four negative statements that they must not buy in to:

1. I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself. 2. I must be approved (accepted) by certain people to accept myself. 3. Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be blamed and condemned. 4. I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless (McAllister 29).

Tell students as individuals they cannot get caught in one of these four traps because it will not only paralyze school work but it will also paralyze anything they set out to do in life. This are the statements emotional baggage is packed with.

There are four traps that I tell my students not to get caught in.

Don´t be caught in the "I must perform up to par" Syndrome (McAllister 31). Fear prevents people from trying new things because they are afraid of failure.

The second trap is the"I must be approved by others" Syndrome (McAllister 51). This leads to the false idea that acceptance by others in the key to fulfillment and happiness.

When we are in this syndrome, we cannot function properly because every move we make is dictated by what others think about us.

This leads to the fear of being rejected.

Then the third trap is the trap of blame.
"I have to blame something so I will." (McAllister 71). We tend to blame ourselves or something else for our predicament. Some statements like the following fit this syndrome:

I am what I am because of my circumstances.

I am what I am because I had an abusive mother.

I am what I am because I have no money.

I am what I am because I don´t have prestige.

I am what I am because I never had bad any luck.

The last trap to avoid is "I feel very ashamed Syndrome (McAllister 103). There is something wrong me something in my past that has made me unworthy and it can never be repaired. I must always be what I have been.I have little

self worth left but .I am what I am. I cannot change. (McAllister 103).

I remind them that the only thing that can be totally controlled is their outlook on things.

Another way that I help to provide a way for them to be affirmed is through the two hours of community service that I have my students do. They must do this within the course of one semester.

One student that was involved in the community service activity was a 55 year old black woman. She needed another job because she was just was existing and not on welfare. She volunteered at a local retirement home loved it so much went back on her own. Then the administration offered her a job.The pride I saw in here as she told me that she had acquired a job because of her efforts was unmeasurable. She said,"I feel better about myself that I have ever felt before."

How do we promote this course that provides an avenue of redemption? Of course all instructors could incorporate some of this into their teachings, yet I realize that it is easier for some just because of the discipline they teach. This program has grown immensely thanks to support groups throughout our college. The counselors in the Counseling Department. The students themselves who have had the course. We place bookmarks all around the college advertising the class. We place posters in visible places in the college. We provide an information table for promotion

at registration time. Some staff and faculty wear shirts during the registration period.

We go from here. We as educators have the chance to help individuals become whole. I am convinced that our effectiveness will be much greater and many lives will be touched in a way far beyond academics if we will incorporate these self-esteem building techniques into our lectures and class procedures.

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